

Chicago Tribune

FOUNDED JUNE 10, 1847

J. HOWARD WOOD, Publisher
W. D. MAXWELL, Editor

THE NEWSPAPER is an institution developed by modern civilization to present the news of the day, to foster commerce and industry, to inform and lead public opinion, and to furnish that check upon government which no constitution has ever been able to provide.

—THE TRIBUNE CREDO SECRET FUNDS FOR A SECRET PLANE

How does Congress appropriate money for an expensive and secret new supersonic plane without knowing that it ever authorized a dime, let alone that it ever approved development of the plane? Sen. Gordon Allott [R., Colo.] raised this question in the Senate when he called on Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara to explain how the A-11 warplane was financed without the knowledge of most members of Congress, or even most members of the committees that vote the funds.

The A-11, conceived in 1959 and contracted to Lockheed Aircraft, builder of the U-2 spy plane, was produced with almost the speed and secrecy of the war time atomic bomb project. President Johnson released the secret of the A-11 at a Feb. 23 press conference. It has been flying for more than a year, reportedly at three times the speed of sound, at heights above 20 miles and over vast stretches of the earth's surface.

Not once during the extensive closed door hearings the defense appropriations subcommittee, of which he is a member, held on the military budget, said Allott, was anything heard about the A-11 which he estimated has cost between 100 million and 500 million dollars. Other rumors place the cost as high as 1½ billion dollars for the plane and its 10 or 11 duplicates.

The Colorado Republican charged that the rights of members of Congress to make the nation's decisions had evidently been abrogated in the A-11 case and demanded to know "what is going on" when a decision is made "in our name" to use "hidden" funds.

Such a decision was first made during World War II in the name of maintaining security for the Manhattan [A-bomb] project. After the war, the late Sen. Kenneth McKellar [D., Tenn.], acting chairman of the Senate appropriations committee, recalled how President Roosevelt entrusted the A-bomb secret to a handful of Democrats and Republicans in the House and Senate so that the budget could be secretly larded with more than 2 billion dollars for the Manhattan project.

One of those involved in that war time plan was Rep. Clarence Cannon [D., Mo.], still, at 85, chairman of the powerful House appropriations committee. As he did then, Cannon still heads a very select small subcommittee which reviews top secret military spending, altho he won't talk about the current activities of this group. Nor will its Senate counterpart. Both are understood, however, to have approved the funding of the U-2 and the A-11.

It is one thing to bypass the regular legislative process in time of war, as was done with the atomic bomb project. It is another, in time of peace, to hide the spending of hundreds of millions of dollars from those elected by the people to decide how the taxpayers' money should be spent.

A case can always be made for secrecy in the name of national security, whether justified or not. To slip the immense power of the purse, under the blanket of security, from the many in Congress to an elite few—no matter how dedicated and responsible they may be—is perilous to our form of government.

CPYRGHT

CPYRGHT